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ABSTRACT

This speech by Richard W. Rileyasserts that education is becoming a more important component of modern society and is absolutely crucial for any society wishing to modernize. The wealth of any nation in the information age is dependent upon its human capital, which is valuable in direct proportion to its level of education and training. There are a number of factors that bear directly on the quality of education; one is technology. Technology can and is transforming education. It is a powerful tool to supplement teacher training and preparation. Teacher quality is also crucial, and there is a growing shortage of talented, well-qualified teachers around the world, especially in the fields of math and science. Decentralization is a growing trend in education around the world, as countries with strong traditions of centralized educational institutions look for ways to capture the dynamism and innovation that may accompany a loosening of central control. The demand for higher education is increasing most rapidly, and is direct function of the growing importance of technology and the importance of human capital; it is higher education that most effectively makes people "capital intensive." A function of growing globalization of the world's economy is an increasing level of international educational exchanges. Advancing education around the world is in the interest of all nations and all people. (KFT)

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*Speeches and Testimony*

Contact: Erica Lepping (202) 401-3026

Remarks as prepared for delivery by U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley

# The Growing Importance of International Education

La Maison Française
Washington, D.C.
April 19, 2000

Fact Sheet on the Secretary's Recent Trip to Asia

Executive Memorandum on International Education

Good morning. Thank you Ambassador for your gracious introduction. And may I ask you to stay here for a moment. I want to extend my thanks to the French Ambassador and his wife Anne for their graciousness in hosting this occasion. I would also like to thank Daimler-Chrysler, the corporate sponsor as well for their generosity.

I would like to present the Ambassador with a gift and with this gift comes a story. As many of you know, much of Europe was hit by a devastating ice storm last winter. News stories recounted how tens of thousands of trees were either damaged or destroyed including many at the palace of Versailles.

This news story touched a group of school children in Fayette, Georgia, a town named after one of the first great friends of the United States, the Marquis de Lafayette. And these children came up with a wonderful gift.

To assist me in making the presentation, I would like to ask Erica and Alyson Faller to come forward.

These two young women are students at Greenbelt

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Middle School in Prince Georges County. The school sponsors a French and English dual language program. I have asked the twins to translate for me in my presentation to the Ambassador.

(translate) In response to the loss of so many trees in France, the children of Fayette, Georgia, started a successful campaign to send 10,000 new trees to France. As a result of this wonderful gesture, our continuing friendship with France grows stronger.

(translate) I am pleased to present on behalf of the children of Fayette, a new seedling, the first of several thousand trees that are now being shipped to France. This tree is a Valley Forge elm tree from our National Arboretum. As all Americans know, Valley Forge has a special place in American history.

Thank you Erica and Alyson for your lovely translation.

**EDUCATION IS NOW ON THE WORLD AGENDA**

Now, let me share with you my thoughts on the importance of international education. I have just returned from a two-week trip to Asia, which included important meetings with the education ministers from the G-8 and APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation). These education leaders represented the hopes and aspirations of almost three billion people and together they represented over 80 percent of the world's wealth.

This is also a timely opportunity to make this report. In a few weeks, educators and leaders from around the world will assemble in Dakar, Senegal, for the World Education Forum. Norma Cantú, one of my assistant secretaries, will be representing me at this important conference.

Today, I would like to report back to you on my meetings with my fellow G-8 and APEC education ministers. I would also like to suggest a series of new steps to re-energize the cause of international education here in the United States. The United States has much to learn as well as gain by such an engagement with the world. I also believe that the United States needs to have a clear and strong

national policy when it comes international education.

The U.S. Department of Education has a long tradition of active engagement with educators from around the world. Each year, over 1,500 educators from other nations visit our Department to learn about the state of American education. In my seven years as the U.S. Secretary of Education, I have seen an enormous increase in the number of education ministers who take the time to visit with me.

Education has taken its place along with trade and economics, keeping the peace, the increasing mobility of the world's people, and other major issues on the agenda of international meetings. In 1998, at the Summit of the Americas, for example, education was the number one item on the agenda for discussion by the hemisphere's 34 heads of state and government.

Virtually every nation sent its education minister as well. Here a story is in order. Education was put on the agenda for the Summit of the Americas because President Cardozo of Brazil called President Clinton after listening to President Clinton's State of the Union speech, which placed such a strong emphasis on the importance of education.

This past summer, the G-8 nations' leaders discussed education at their Summit meeting in Cologne, Germany. And education will clearly be a major topic of discussion in the upcoming G-8 Summit this summer in Okinawa, Japan.

The growing importance of education is a new international development, and I do not see it going away. Every sensible leader recognizes that the wealth of a nation in the information age-the economic, social and cultural wealth-lies in its people and what they know and can do.

Whether a country prospers economically depends largely on its human capital; whether democracies old and new flourish, and whether citizens treat one another with trust and respect depends on the values and practices that can be learned both at home and in school.

Education is the key determinant of the success of individuals as well as nations. Many Americans would be astonished to learn that education is one of this nation's leading growth sectors when it comes to international trade.

But the beauty and the benefit of discussing education on a global stage is that it's not a zero-sum game; what I gain in the exchange is not a loss to you; our sharing what we have learned about education practice benefits both of us. The concerns of the many visitors who come to visit us in Washington are often the same as my own.

How do we close the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students? How do we prepare teachers to teach with new technologies?

How do we reach the millions of children and adults who do not have even the most basic skills like reading? How do we transform our education systems so that they are less rigid, more creative and more able to adapt to the demands of the 21st century?

Tom Friedman, the foreign affairs correspondent for the *New York Times*, may have captured what is especially new about this new era when he wrote, "the biggest foreign policy issue is now the biggest domestic issue: education. In this era of globalization, we think we need to get smarter to survive in a world without walls." I think Tom Friedman has it about right. "Saber es poder"-knowledge is power-is a Spanish phrase that captures this sentiment as well.

I also believe there is something else that is important to consider. For much of the last 50 years, international education was often defined by Cold War imperatives. Now, we are in a new time and much of the world fortunately is at peace. Let us use this time wisely and define a new set of principles for international education that respond to the contemporary challenges of our time: Principles that encourage intellectual freedom, democracy building, human rights, the peaceful resolution of disputes, cultural diversity and a willingness to see the advance of education for the good of all, including

the millions of children in the developing world who have no schooling.

I hope to encourage such a dialogue by giving this address today. So let me begin by offering a brief account from my recent trip and then suggest a series of opportunities and actions that we can take together.

## A REPORT FROM THE FIELD

In the course of my two-week trip to Asia, which included separate visits to China and Thailand, I had the opportunity to talk with education ministers from many developed and developing countries. Let me give you a report card of what I saw and heard on specific areas of interest: technology; academics and social development; teacher quality; decentralization, access to higher education, and the importance every nation places on increasing exchanges.

**Technology:** There is a clear recognition that technology can and will transform education. As a result, many countries are investing heavily in information technology. There is a widespread recognition that technology can be a powerful addition to teacher training and preparation. At the same time, there is growing recognition that many teachers lack the skills they need to take advantage of this new technology.

These leaders also recognize that more information does not necessarily translate into an increase in knowledge, much less the wisdom to discern what is important and to be valued. This suggests that we must do much more to give teachers and students many of the skills they need to analyze and understand larger volumes of information.

There was also a great awareness about the digital divide within countries and between developed and developing countries. Many ministers expressed a strong desire to use technology to create classroom-to-classroom connections via the Internet as a way to build cultural awareness and to foster bilingual and multilingual language study. And it goes without saying that distance learning will reshape-and at the same time offer-us many new opportunities to expand the scope and breadth of international

education.

Academics and Social Development: Educators from China, Japan and Singapore are re-evaluating their educational systems and looking for a new balance between academics and social development. For generations these nations have put a premium on academics and a rigorous testing system. There is now growing recognition in these countries, however, that these current practices limit opportunities for creativity and innovation. And they, like us, are increasingly interested in civic and moral development along with academics.

There is a great deal of interest in these countries in our efforts here in the United States to create after-school programs, to promote character education, to encourage family, community and business involvement, and to expand arts education. The art exhibited here today through the generosity of the International Child Art Foundation, clearly shows us that when we allow children to explore their creativity through the arts, they shine.

Almost all nations are eager to make sure that their students learn additional languages, particularly English. The ministers of several nations including Russia, China, and Thailand are interested in examining ways that we can help them develop high-quality English instruction.

I will be the first to tell you that we Americans have much to learn from other nations when it comes to learning new languages, and we are just as eager for help. More than any other developed nation, the United States has fallen behind when it comes to teaching our students the importance of learning an additional language. My two assistants-Erica and Alyson-are more the exception than the rule and we need to change that.

**Teacher Quality:** Like many educators and policy makers in the United States, my counterparts in other nations have a growing concern about recruiting and preparing the next generation of teachers. Like the United States, many nations face a growing shortage of teachers in specialized fields like math and science and helping children with disabilities.

There also seems to be a growing degree of dismay about current practices in teacher education, the preparation of new teachers entering the profession, and the lack of real professional development. This concern about the state of the teaching profession extends even to Asian countries that traditionally have revered teaching as a profession.

**Decentralization:** One of the more interesting aspects of my conversations is the search for what I call a new and balanced model of education that is appropriate for the 21st century. Nations with strong traditions of national education systems are seeking to achieve greater levels of decentralization.

At the same time, here in the United States I see a new trend emerging-state governments are assuming more power over low-performing schools that need to improve. All this suggests to me that all of us are searching for a new and more flexible model of education, with a new balance of responsibility, that fits our times.

My Department has worked very successfully in creating a new model of education built around the concept of partnerships-linking high schools and universities, reaching out to parents, community groups and business leaders, and engaging the private sector and foundations to encourage educational reform.

Over 27,000 American college students, for example, are working as reading tutors in our elementary schools across America. And we have a very exciting partnership initiative called GEAR UP that is now linking hundreds of our middle schools to colleges and universities to create new pathways to college.

**Higher Education:** Many nations are facing an increased demand for higher education and are taking a new look at the diversity of America's system of higher education, including our unique community college system. As one expert wrote, the United States has a "highly forgiving" system that allows more than one opportunity to gain a college degree.

Nations that traditionally have relied on one single

exam to gain admission to college are starting to see some advantage in the American willingness to give students more than one opportunity to gain a higher education. And every nation is aware that the Internet will reshape higher education, and that there is much work to be done now to create a new framework for distance learning.

**Increasing International Exchanges:** Every nation is keen on fostering greater faculty and student exchanges. The G-8, for example, has adopted a goal of doubling exchanges in the next 10 years. The European Union is working very aggressively to grapple with those core specifics-from credit transfers, to joint programs, to financial aid, to housing arrangements-that can lead to the doubling of exchange programs.

Asian countries also have a strong desire to increase such exchange opportunities. Sometimes, other countries find it difficult to make the necessary connections to carry out these exchanges given the independent nature of our system of higher education system.

The United States has been very fortunate to have a large number of foreign exchange students on our college campuses. Almost 500,000 foreign students are currently studying at American colleges and universities.

About half of these students are in graduate education where they make a valuable contribution to this nation's research effort. These students bring at least $9 billion per year to our economy, and they enrich our campuses and communities in non-economic ways, too. They develop lifelong friendships, which benefit both nations in countless ways.

It is clear to me from my conversations with other ministers that other nations see new opportunity in such exchanges and are working very hard to make their exchanges opportunities more attractive, more accessible and less costly. This is something we should welcome, but at the same time it should encourage the United States to re-examine what we are doing as well. We should not be resting on our laurels.

I am pleased that the number of American students studying abroad has more than doubled in the last decade. Last year, about 114,000 American students were studying abroad, a 14.6 percent increase over the year before. This is a very positive trend. But much more needs to be done to create new exchange opportunities for American students.

At the very least, the United States should meet the newly established G-8 goal of at least doubling its exchange opportunities in higher education in the next 10 years, and that means finding new ways of sending and recruiting twice as many students.

This concludes my brief report card. As you can see, many, many issues are on the international education agenda. Let me now set the stage for a series of proposals that I would like to put forward by talking about the growing importance of international education.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

I begin by stating the obvious-in this new global environment when you can e-mail a colleague in Japan or download a chapter of a book from Paris-we have many more opportunities to learn from each other. This new education era is defined by the freedom of information, a freedom that will surely enhance the power of individuals to make choices about their lives.

This opportunity to learn from each other allows all of us to improve the education of all of our children. The United States, for example, looks to other countries to benchmark the performance of our students and our system of public education. Assessments like the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) allow us to evaluate both our academic strengths and weaknesses.

Sometimes the results of these assessments lead to a rude awakening and lend themselves to a certain amount of humility. And that's healthy. When other nations are doing well in teaching certain fields, we need to know what they are doing so we can improve our own education system.

When I visited Singapore for the APEC conference I made a point of visiting a high school to see first-hand why Singapore leads the world in math instruction. The very important Glenn Commission, under the leadership of former astronaut and Senator John Glenn, is currently reviewing math and science instruction in the United States. So this was a timely visit.

Many experts believe America's math curriculum is an inch deep and a mile wide and that we do not challenge our students enough. My visit to Singapore confirms this opinion. The textbooks that students in Singapore use, for example, are much thinner and much more focused. Students in the ninth and tenth grades in Singapore are doing work that American students do in the 11th and 12th grades.

The United States also has much to learn from our colleagues in the European Union. France and Italy are well known for their wonderful systems of early childhood education. In the United States, many states are now actively working to create a more formal system of universal pre-kindergarten. So it makes a great deal of sense to me for American educators to be reaching out to our French and Italian colleagues, who have a wealth of experience.

At the same time, the United States has much to contribute as well. The United States has a wonderful system of higher education that attracts hundreds of thousands of foreign students each year. We also have much to contribute when it comes to educational research, the use of technology, and improving the education of children with disabilities.

The United States, for example, has a very strong record in working with the international disability community on issues dealing with education, technology, and employment. My Department supports the work of several international centers including the World Institute on Disability, located in Berkeley, California.

This May, I will be traveling to Ireland to attend a conference of educators, from both the Republic and Northern Ireland, that will have strong focus on

educating children with disabilities. On the same trip, I will be visiting London to meet with my British counterparts to discuss a joint conference on how to turn around failing schools.

Some educational issues can only be addressed together. A good example is distance education. The implications both for our learners and our education institutions are enormous and this is particularly true in higher education.

There are a host of questions that must be addressed. How do we determine the quality of the offerings? How to confer and recognize credentials? How do we work together to close the digital divide? These are questions that will require international cooperation.

Let me suggest another important area of cooperation-what I call the power of educational diplomacy. Many of the conflicts that we are seeing today-Kosovo, Rwanda, the troubles of Northern Ireland, the Middle East, East Timor-spring, at least in part, from ethnic intolerance.

Building tolerance and respect for others and strengthening the capacity of citizens to participate in civil society need to take place in the home and in schools. Promoting democracy through education is something that my Department is pleased to support through the 50 nation "Civitas" movement. Each year, we spend $7 million dollars to encourage such civic and economic exchanges.

I strongly believe that the growth of democracy, economic prosperity and economic stability throughout the world is linked to the advance of education. This is one of the strongest reasons why the United States should have an active and strong international education agenda. Education and democracy go hand in hand.

As a great democracy, the United States has a vested interest in promoting democracy and economic stability throughout the world. When we help democracy and economic prosperity in the rest of the world, we are also helping ourselves beyond the fact that it is right thing to do.

All throughout the world there are thousands of

leaders in other nations-political, economic and social leaders-who got a taste of democracy in all of its complexity when they came to study here in the United States. They saw America, in all our goodness and in some of our excesses, too.

But more than anything, they were able to get in touch with the American people and understand why the American people care so deeply about freedom and democracy. People matter, democracy matters and advancing education throughout the world makes a powerful difference.

**THE UNITED STATES CONTRIBUTION TO INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION**

Let me now suggest how the United States can contribute to the advancement of international education. Obviously we can begin by an increased focus on international education by our own government. This is why my Department and the Department of State have asked President Clinton to issue a new executive memorandum that would renew and strengthen the federal government's commitment to international education. And he will sign it today.

This memorandum calls for the federal government, in partnership with others, to promote study abroad by a broader and more diverse group of U.S. students. Today, only about 9 percent of our undergraduate students study abroad, and less than a third of those spend a semester or more; and very few of them represent minorities that make up our growing student population.

The directive also calls for other new efforts: new attention to encouraging more young people to come to America as exchange students; strengthen support for foreign language learning at all levels; and new efforts to make sure that international education is an integral component of U.S. undergraduate education.

My friends, we must build on the great foundation of the Fulbright Scholarship program, and not just rest on its reputation in these new times.

One hundred American institutions of higher learning, for example, educate half of all foreign

exchange students. Surely, we can find new ways to encourage many other colleges and universities to become more active in the international arena.

I also believe that many more American college students need to see the world with a new set of eyes. And the best way to do that is to study overseas.

A small college in Minnesota-Saint Olaf College-does something quite remarkable: over 90 percent of its students study abroad. That's very unusual. Only nine colleges and universities in the entire United States, including Georgetown University and American University here in the District, send over 20 percent of their students overseas.

I would be happy if every college in the United States set the goal of making sure that 20 percent of their students participated in some type of exchange program over the next 10 years. I look forward to working with America's higher education community to create these new types of opportunities.

A second part of a new American agenda has to be recognition that the United States must become much more of an engaged member of the international community by once again becoming an active member of UNESCO. Time and time again on my recent trip, other education ministers asked me why the United States did not rejoin the new and reformed UNESCO.

UNESCO offers the broadest world forum for action on making education for all a reality. The United States should have a seat in that forum. I urge members of Congress to authorize the funds necessary to make it possible. As I said earlier, the United States, like other wealthy nations, has both a responsibility and a vested interest in strengthening education in developing countries.

According to UNESCO-the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization-more than 113 million children worldwide still have no access to primary education, and 60 percent of those are girls.

When young girls are educated, not only do they increase their future earning power, they also raise

healthier children with a brighter future.

This is one good reason why President Clinton is asking the Congress for a 50 percent increase in our international assistance for basic education. This is the right priority and I strongly support this proposal.

We must also press forward in coming to grips with how distance learning will reshape higher education around the world. This September, my Department will host our National Conference on Technology, which each year has a growing number of international participants.

In addition, I invite members of the international community to co-host and participate in an "experts" meeting the following day on distance learning and higher education. I know that this issue is of very high importance to leaders of higher education around the world. I believe that a meeting of international experts and leaders in American higher education can set the stage for a larger international summit on this very important matter.

I also believe that the Internet can foster classroom-to-classroom exchanges that allow young people to learn about each other from each other. Many American teachers are already establishing these types of connections on their own. I can tell you that it makes a difference.

Several years ago, I visited a school in Knollwood, Maryland, with Vice President Gore. The two students were connected through the Internet with two students in Ethiopia. I asked them what had they learned through this exchange. One of the students looked up at said, " We have learned to be friends."

It would be my hope that every elementary and secondary school in the United States, public and private, would establish a relationship with a school from another country to build these types of classroom-to-classroom connections. This would give all children a broader worldview, and I hope that it would encourage many more American children to learn a foreign language.

This is something I care about. What I call English + One, or bi-literacy. I can tell you that when Michelin came to South Carolina to build a new plant when I

was governor there, the people in my state who spoke French were put at the front of the line when it came to good jobs.

In countries from Spain to Singapore, all children are studying a second and often a third language. And because English is increasingly the language of commerce and the Internet, there is very strong demand for English language learning almost everywhere. Others want to learn English, and we can learn their languages.

I am a strong supporter of high-quality dual-immersion schools that help children to learn English and another language. We currently have 260 of these types of schools in the United States. I believe we should raise that number to at least 1,000. Currently, we are requesting $310 million in bilingual education programs that could support these types of schools. This is a $54 million increase over last year.

This also leads me to make this last suggestion. Many nations would like additional help in teaching their children English. The Peace Corps for generations has done a wonderful job in this regard but the Peace Corps cannot do it alone.

I believe retired American teachers and, indeed, the many baby boomers nearing retirement and thinking about a second career would find great satisfaction in participating in such an endeavor. With proper training, I believe these Americans could make a contribution. I look forward to a discussion with interested groups around such a proposal.

**CONCLUSION**

Throughout my address I have spoken about the growing importance of international education and the need for America to engage the world.

Yes, we are fortunate to be a great super power. But with that power comes a responsibility to work with other nations, to respect their points of view, and to work with educators throughout the world to help every child and adult to reach her or his full potential.

This is in America's larger interests and it is also the right thing to do. We can learn from each other, and

with each other, and we can learn in so many different ways in this new information era. For it is my sincere belief that by advancing education at all levels-from teaching a child to read in Africa or sending a young American off to Paris on a Fulbright scholarship-we enrich our world.

The freedom to learn is, to my way of thinking, a basic human right. And by expanding this freedom to learn we strengthen democracy, encourage prosperity and inspire new intellectual thought and inquiry.

This is why international education is so important and why I have spoken about it at some length today. Thank you.

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